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Climate change and neonatal survival: the case of Ethiopia

Ethiopia's successes and ambitions, highlighted in *The Lancet Global Health's* January Editorial,¹ are threatened by the present drought, a result of failed seasonal rains worsened by El Niño. Drought resulting in poor agricultural yields is already having a highly destructive effect on the health of more than 10 million people in Ethiopia, including 1.7 million children, and pregnant and lactating women. Since August, 2015, severe acute malnutrition in children is on the rise, comparable in its effects with the Horn of Africa drought in 2011.² Malnutrition, wasting, or kwashiorkor, in children causes weight loss and stunting as a result of prolonged food deprivation. Such problems not only threaten child survival, but can also have a lifelong effect on cognitive ability, mental functioning, and the ability to cope with infection.³ Moreover, stunting in women predicts cephalopelvic disproportion and difficult childbirths, which increase rates of operative delivery and maternal and neonatal mortality.⁴ That only 16% of Ethiopian mothers are assisted by skilled birth attendants might exacerbate this danger.⁵ The country's Health Sector Transformation Plan (HSTP) aims to improve access to health care, including bringing about a reduction in neonatal mortality to 20 per 1000 livebirths by 2020.¹ There is a need for ongoing investment in neonatal health in the country for this HSTP goal to be achieved, including effective preventive measures, such as supplementary food and targeted cash transfers for the most vulnerable households, in addition to the proposed transformation of health services at district level.⁶ At least in the short term, Ethiopia has called for international support and immediate food assistance,² to ensure that the country's development gains of the

past decade are preserved and to allow progress in population health outcomes to continue.

We declare no competing interests.

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- 2 Government of Ethiopia and Humanitarian Partners. Ethiopia humanitarian requirements document 2016. http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ethiopia_hrd_2016.pdf (accessed Dec 25, 2015).
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- 6 Langendorf C, Roederer T, de Pee S, et al. Preventing acute malnutrition among young children in crises: a prospective intervention study in Niger. *PLoS Med* 2014; **11**: e1001714.